

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, April 21, 2004 at 9:30 a.m. to hold a hearing on Iraq Transition: Civil War on Civil Society (II).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Indian Affairs be authorized to meet on Wednesday, April 21, 2004, at 9:30 a.m. in Room 106 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building to conduct a business meeting on S. 344, a bill expressing the policy of the United States regarding the United States' Relationship with Native Hawaiians and to provide a process for the recognition by the United States of Native Hawaiian governing entity, and for other purposes; and S. 1721, a bill to amend the Indian Land Consolidation Act to improve provisions relating to probate of trust and restricted land, and for other purposes, to be followed immediately by a hearing on S. 297, the Federal Acknowledgement Process Reform Act of 2003.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Joint Economic Committee be authorized to conduct a hearing in Room 216 of the Hart Senate Office Building, Wednesday, April 21, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Forests and Public Lands of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, April 21, at 2:30 p.m. in room SD-366.

The purpose of the hearings is to receive testimony on implementation of the recreation fee demonstration program by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, and on policies related to the program.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator HARKIN, I ask unanimous consent that Natalie Dupecher of his staff be granted the privilege of the floor for the duration of today's debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—
H.R. 3550

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, in a moment I will propound a unanimous consent request with respect to the highway bill, but first let me explain to everybody where we are. We passed our

version of the bill in the Senate on February 12 by an overwhelming majority, 76 to 21. Subsequent to that, the House passed their bill, H.R. 3550, on April 2 by, again, an overwhelming majority of 357 to 65. That bill is now at the desk.

Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the House-passed highway bill, H.R. 3550; provided further that all after the enacting clause be stricken and the text of S. 1072, as passed, be inserted in lieu thereof; the bill then be read a third time and passed; further, the Senate then insist on its amendment, request a conference with the House, and the Chair then be authorized to appoint conferees on the part of the Senate, with a ratio of 11 to 10.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The assistant Democratic leader.

Mr. REID. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, this is legislation I really understand. Senator INHOFE and a couple others worked hard to get this legislation passed. I would say, initially, this legislation could not have passed but for the support, under some very difficult times, of the majority leader. I commend him for his outward support and inward support. He supported us openly on the Senate floor and in all of the discussions we had off the Senate floor. I am very grateful for that.

We have a very fine bill. The House bill is a bill that is OK. It is not as good as ours. But let me say this. We were moving along just fine on this legislation until, for reasons unknown to most people, the President said he is going to veto the bill if it is more than X number of dollars. Keep in mind that this legislation that passed the Senate does not create a single new tax. A vast majority of the money comes out of the trust fund to take care of this. It takes care of highways and transit—a good bill. It would create more than a million new jobs—high-paying jobs—directly.

So I say to my friend, the distinguished majority leader, I believe if conferees were appointed tonight what we would do is the Senate would designate staff people to work on this bill with the House people. I would suggest—and I don't care what it is called; call it whatever you want to call it—our staffs should start working on this legislation.

It is obvious, because the Speaker has indicated why he does not want this bill. He said he does not want his Members to have to cast a tough vote. Mr. President, 357 to 65—I served in the House. I know how many votes it takes to override a veto. Over here I know how many votes it takes to override a veto. This bill is a good bill, and the majority of the House and the Senate would vote to override the President's veto. I believe the President, when confronted with the facts of what good legislation this is, would not veto the bill anyway, with the need for creating jobs. But I would hope the majority leader would allow the staffs to begin

working on this to see if we can get to a point where a conference committee can be appointed. I want this bill to pass. I think it is something that needs to pass for our country. But I would hope we don't get in a position where our staffs can't work on this. I am sure the majority leader knows the staffs have already had one productive meeting. We could have a couple more and maybe get to the point where the majority leader would be satisfied that the staffs are doing the right thing, in his estimation. I would be happy to talk to my distinguished leader. He knows my interest in this bill. Hopefully, we would get it passed.

I apologize, this late in the evening, for talking as long as I have. But I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, we are in a unique situation, as you just heard explained quite well. This is a bill I very much want. It is a nonpartisan bill about which this body has spoken very loudly. I appreciate the leadership of my colleague from Nevada on this bill. We are very proud of the product we have produced. My whole intention of coming to the floor, which is the normal process, to appoint conferees, Republican and Democratic conferees, is to continue in an orderly fashion and bring the bill to completion so it is law, not just a bill. We passed it February 12. The House passed it on April 2. We passed two extensions of the previous highway bill already and the deadline for the next temporary extension will be next Friday. We will have to do it once again.

I am working very hard so we can have a conference committee, and we can't have a conference committee until we have conferees. It is time to act on the highway bill.

As the distinguished assistant Democratic leader said, over a million, and I would say 2 million, new jobs will be created by this bill. It is vital to our economy. It is vital to the Nation's infrastructure. Regular order would be for us to appoint conferees. We will continue to work, having heard the objection, in regular order which, in my mind, would accelerate passage of the bill. We will continue to work with the other side, although I am disappointed we cannot proceed with this regular order. But I am committed to the bill. The assistant Democratic leader is. Over 70 Members of this body are. So we will continue to work diligently in that regard.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate immediately proceed to executive session